

caught on 15th September 1958. In 1962 two red-eyed moths were taken, one specimen of *Scotia exclamationis* L. and one of *Diarsia rubi* Vieweg (both Noctuidae). Number four was an *Archips podana* Scop. (Tortricidae), met with in 1963. The next year furnished again two specimens, one of *Amathes c. nigrum* L. (Noctuidae), the other of *Thera obeliscata* Hübner (Geometridae). Finally an *Apamea anceps* Denis & Schiff. (*sordida* Bkh.) (Noctuidae) was caught in 1965. This makes a total at present of seven specimens, a very low number when the great number of moths is taken into consideration which every year are observed in traps and on m.v. lamps.

A few points are very striking. First that the phenomenon is not restricted to one family. We now know representatives of four different families, so that it is not excluded that it may occur in all "Heterocera". The second point is that the insect is for the rest perfectly normal. Red-eyed specimens are well known in vertebrates, but then they are always albinos with all the disadvantages of it. But the red-eyed moths are for the rest quite normal. I may add that the colour, which may vary from a more orange red to pure red, is very striking, so that it could hardly have escaped attention of, for instance, the entomologists of the preceding generation who looked so accurately at their specimens. It seems that we have to do with a modern mutant, which spreads very slowly through the populations. That it should be restricted to the Netherlands, is hardly to be expected.

I therefore draw the attention of the British lepidopterists to this striking colour aberration. When they sort out the victims of their traps or are working with their m.v. lamps it will not cost much extra time to look at the eyes of the animals. If the specimen is a still living female keep it for eggs, for the form will almost certainly be a hereditary one and it will be highly interesting to know how it inherits. And what is the result of the deviation of the normal eye colour for the insect itself?

Amsterdam Z 2, Oude IJselstraat 12 III.

Notes on the Larval Habits of *Eriogaster lanestris* Linn. (Lep. Lasiocampidae)

By R. W. WATSON, F.B.A.A., F.A., F.C.C.S., F. Comm. A., F.R.E.S.

I first became acquainted with *lanestris* when I resided in the Shaftesbury area of North Dorset for a few months in 1944. During March the fur-covered clusters of ova were a conspicuous sight on the blackthorn, bramble, and hawthorn, the female usually choosing a single twig often at the top of the hedge.

The larvae emerge during late April or early May according to the season and grow very slowly at first. In the early instars they have a rather shiny black worm-like appearance. Great industry is displayed in the weaving of the communal web. From my long experience of this species I have found that after spinning the second web they increase this in size and do not normally leave it to build another.

In the year in question, 1944, the species was very numerous, the webs being about the size of a large grapefruit and dense greyish white in appearance. After several weeks' use these webs become very un-

sanitary, being full of frass, cast skins and any larvae which have died.

At this stage in the development there is considerable disparity in the growth rate. It seems that after the change when the handsome coloured skin appears the healthy larvae grow more rapidly while some, even when not parasitized, seem to stand still and eventually die.

I have a large wild plum tree in the garden on which I have placed 3-4 webs of *lanestris* each year from 1963 to 1966. Although the tree is about 12' high and 7' in diameter, after a week or two most of the larvae finish up in one large web, usually on the sheltered west side.

When leaving the web to feed, the larvae spin silken threads over the branches, presumably in order to find their way home. These tracks become wide and dense near the web, diverging as they come to various branches, and continuing to the feeding site. At all times of the day larvae may be seen going to and fro, reminiscent of ants at work. Other larvae may be seen in the web, probably awaiting a moult; and at other times particularly when the first warmth of the morning sun is felt the larger larvae cluster on the outside of the web and a very pretty sight they make.

The Lackey (*Malacosoma neustria* L.) is also found quite commonly in the same area. In the years 1963, 1964, 1965 and 1966 I placed a web of *neustria* on the same tree. For some unaccountable reason most of the larvae disappeared and what is more strange the remainder made no attempt to repair or renew their own web, but became unpaying guests of *lanestris*. Often the larvae may be seen sunning themselves in apparent harmony on the web, actually touching *lanestris* as they arrange themselves in rows.

In 1965 *neustria* took up their lodgings on the 8th June and remained for approximately three weeks.

By 2nd July all larvae had dispersed, *lanestris* feeding singly for a few days prior to pupation. On dispersal they travel some considerable distance. I have found them within 100 yards of their home tree.

Birds do not seem partial to *lanestris*, except for one occasion when the web was torn open and all the larvae had disappeared. I believe a cuckoo was responsible.

Lanestris is not an easy larva to rear. While living in Dorset, and collecting the food from nearby hedges, frequented by *lanestris* I had no trouble. Here in the New Forest where I have not found *lanestris* in the wild it is not so easy, only about 30% success being achieved.

Each year it is a pleasant trip to find *lanestris*. The method is to drive slowly along the lanes, the eye soon becoming accustomed to the quest and as many webs as are required may be found in a few hours.

Porcorum, Sandy Down, Boldre, Lymington, Hants. January 1967.

The Nature Conservancy is planning to operate a Lepidoptera Distribution Maps Scheme this spring. At present the Macrolepidoptera only are envisaged with a list of 27 butterflies and about 470 moths. Those taking part will be requested to fill in cards supplied by the organiser giving the required details as to species, locality, habitat, etc., and these cards may be obtained by writing to Mr. J. HEATH, Biological Records Centre, Monks Wood Experimental Station, The Nature Conservancy, Abbots Ripton, Huntingdon.

I would suggest that those taking part should also keep notes of microlepidoptera species noted, which could be kept until such time as the scheme can be made complete by the inclusion of these genera.—ED.

Austrotortrix postvittana Walk. in Hampshire

By E. SADLER

Whilst browsing through the collection of a friend, Lieut. S. Swift, R.N., of Alverstoke, near Gosport, a few years ago. I noted a micro unfamiliar to me. A few months ago he kindly allowed me to borrow it.

I in turn passed it on to Mr. S. Wakely, who informs me that it is a female *A. postvittana*. Lieut. Swift tells me that his specimen was taken at the window of a house he then occupied, in Alverstoke, on the evening of 21st September 1962.

Mr. Wakely has sent me the following list of references as to the occurrence of this species in Britain:—

At a meeting of the South London Entomological and Natural History Society on the 13th August 1931, Mr. S. N. A. Jacobs exhibited a female specimen which he had bred from a larva found feeding on a New Zealand Newton pippin apple by Mr. T. R. Eagles.—(*Proc. S. Lond. ent. nat. Hist. Soc.*, 1932-33: 70).

The first record of the species actually breeding in this country was in 1937, when Mr. Woodbridge bred four moths from larvae found feeding in spun shoots of *Euonymus japonica* on 17th June at Newquay, Cornwall.—Meyrick, E. 1937 (*Entomologist*, 70: 256).

Twenty years later it was recorded from Redruth, Portreath, Falmouth and Camborne, Cornwall. Owing to an error the name Camborne was printed as Winborne.—Tremewan, W. G. 1957 (*Entomologist*, 90: 76).

There is one record for Devon where it was recorded at Torquay. Bradley, J. D. and Martin, E. L. 1956 (*Ent. Gaz.*, 7: 151).

The larvae are usually found on *E. japonica*, but they have also been found on red valerian (*Centranthus ruber*) privet and veronica. Larvae may also be reared on apple and hawthorn.—Higgins, H. C. 1958 (*Ent. Rec.*, 70: 53).

Other Cornish localities are Gerrans, Portscatho and Porthtowan, and larvae are reported as feeding on lavender, fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*), cultivated Hypericum, Chrysanthemum and Montbretia.—Mere, R. 1956 (*Ent. Gaz.*, 17: 49-50).

St. Christopher, West Tisted, Alresford, Hants. i.1967.

Notes and Observations

AN EARLY BUTTERFLY.—I was pleased to see a male *Gonepteryx rhamni* L. (brimstone butterfly) in my garden at West Wickham to-day. This is at least a month earlier than usual, due, no doubt, to the exceptionally mild weather.—D. S. BURROWS, 22 Lime Tree Walk, West Wickham, Kent. 5.ii.1967.

EARLY CAPTURES IN 1967.—In my mercury vapour trap on the morning of 31st January were a *Biston strataria* Hufn. and a *Nomophila noctuella* Schiff. The latter, on release, headed strongly northwards. Even taking into account the unusually mild weather, these arrivals seem worthy of notice. These appearances were followed on 2nd February by *Xylocampa areola* Esp. and another *Nomophila noctuella*, and on 3rd February by two more *Biston strataria* and one more *N. noctuella*.—L. W. SIGGS, Sungate, Football Green, Minstead, Lyndhurst, Hants. 3.ii.1967.